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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000245

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#) [SNAR](#)

SUBJECT: LARGE SHAN POPULATION LIVES IN LEGAL LIMBO

REF: A) BANGKOK 4028 B) CHIANG MAI 156 C) CHIANG MAI 150

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1.(U) Summary. Shan activists based in Chiang Mai, including 2005 Reebok Human Rights Award winner Charm Tong, have renewed appeals for the Thai government to recognize as refugees Shan fleeing from Burma. With approximately 140,000 other refugees from Burma in camps along the border, the Thai government is not eager to add an estimated 300,000 Shan in northern Thailand to its burden. The mobility than is available to those in camps. End summary

2. (U) The Chiang Mai-based Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) has redoubled efforts to convince the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to recognize Shan fleeing from Burma as asylum seekers and to provide safe refuge and humanitarian assistance. The government has denied

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ETHNIC COUSINS

3. (U) Although the RTG has not publicly stated its policy toward Shan asylum seekers, Thais generally argue that the Shan are different from

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EXPLOITATION, MISTREATMENT

4. (U) The Shan contend that this lack of recognition leaves them in legal limbo, more vulnerable to labor exploitation and political mistre

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TACIT ASSISTANCE

5. (SBU) Thai security officials oppose the idea of Shan refugee camps, according to Janya Sramajcha, Director for Intelligence for the Offi Finally, given the burden of caring for the Karen and Karenni groups, Thailand cannot afford refugee influxes from the Shan State.

6. (SBU) Another Thai intelligence official who has been part of government discussions on this issue said that RTG reluctance to set up Shan

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AD HOC ARRANGEMENTS

7. (U) According to SWAN, Shan refugees in Thailand fall into three main categories, with hundreds of thousands living as migrant workers throughout Thailand. Another 4,000 displaced persons live in de facto camps set up along the Thai border during the past four years, sometimes shifting back and forth across the border op These groups receive food aid from local Shan-Thai residents in the nearby Thai villages that have secured funding from BRC/BBC with the tacit

8. (U) A small group of 250 are sheltered in Karenni Camp 1 in Mae Hong Son's Muang district and another 600 are registered

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by the Thai Ministry of the Interior at a de facto camp in Chiang Mai's Wiang Haeng district. While those in Wiang Haeng are not allowed acces

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TAKING THE MESSAGE TO THE WHITE HOUSE

9. (U) A number of Shan groups have pushed the issue of recognition over the last decade with little success, as sporadic heavy fighting cau flee to Thailand. The call picked up new momentum after the worldwide release of "License to Rape" by SWAN and Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) in 2002. SWAN founding member and Reebok Human Rights Award winner Charm Tong told the Consul General she did not raise the specific Shan situation with President Bush in her Oc During her 50 minutes in the Oval Office, however, the 23-year-old human rights activist talked with the President and top advisers about human

10. (U) In its efforts to influence RTG policy, SWAN sent an open letter to the attention of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra that has gone

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"PUSHED BACK INTO THE FLAMES"

11. (U) In September 2005, SWAN published a pamphlet titled "Pushed back into the flames" to emphasize "the urgent need for protection of Sha

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REFUGEE STATUS A HELP OR HINDRANCE?

12. (U) UNHCR Regional Representative Hasim Utkan confirmed that this issue, which has "been on my agenda for a long time", took on special intensity some months ago when the Thai military relocated a gr

13. (U) COMMENT: The actual number of Shan displaced persons is impossible to confirm, as neither the Thai government nor UNHCR has made efforts to count them. Living outside of the established refugee c

14. (U) Comment continued: Even SWAN, however, is not advocating refugee camps for 300,000 displaced Shan. While not saying so explicitly, migrant labor protections. Given the fact that a solution for one could be a problem for others, the tangled situation of the Shan in northern Thailand is unlikely to be resolved easily. However, discussions with the Thai government and UNHCR about the need for safe refugee and humanitarian assistance could open the door to more CAMP